

Group Study Guide

First Baptist Church Merritt Island

We Are Resident Aliens

I Peter 1:1-2

January 28th, 2018

Main Point

Followers of Jesus are called to live as pilgrims on a journey. Though our lives on this earth will be marked by pain and suffering, we have a strong God who gives us reasons to hope.

Getting Started

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Have you ever been persecuted, slandered, or looked down upon because of your faith in Christ? Share your experience with the group.

What do you think motivated those who looked down upon you to do so?

What is it about the Christian faith that causes some people to feel threatened? Why do you think there is so much persecution against the Christian church today?

There are many aspects of Christianity that people today find distasteful or even offensive. Some people are offended by the exclusivity of the gospel while others are offended by Christ's teaching on morality. Many people find the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith offensive because they want credit for their good works. All of this tell us something that Jesus constantly reminded His disciples of: we live in a culture that does not share our Christian values. Consequently, we should not be surprised when they look down upon and slander us for refusing to conform to their way of life. Knowing this, Peter began his letter to numerous churches in Asia Minor (Modern day Turkey) by describing his audience as "elect exiles" or "aliens." Peter did this to remind us that though we live under the constant threat of persecution, we can stand firm knowing that this world is not our home.

Scripture: Ask someone to read I Peter 1:1-2.

Observation

How does Peter introduce himself in verse 1? What is significant about the title Peter uses to describe himself?

What do you know about Peter from the Gospels and Acts? What was Peter like? What made Him worthy to be an apostle?

Peter was both eager and brash. He was the first person out of the boat to meet Jesus when Jesus walked on water, but he also quickly lost sight of Jesus and began to sink (Matt. 14:23-33). Peter was the first to speak when Jesus asked questions but often put his foot in his mouth (Matt. 16:13-23). Peter confidently promised that he would never deny Jesus (Matt. 26:35), only to find himself denying Jesus three times. Peter had a humble upbringing as a fisherman, despite this and despite his personal weaknesses, God's spirit empowered him to become a fisher of men as he boldly led the charge in preaching the gospel in the face of persecution in the early days of the Christian church (Acts 1-7).

Peter's unique experiences, failures, triumphs, and suffering as a follower of Christ equipped him to speak timely words of encouragement to Christians in Asia Minor who were living under the threat of increased persecution. More important than his past experiences, Peter had been chosen by God to be an apostle of Jesus Christ, which gave him authority to deliver God's truth.

How does Peter describe the members of the churches from various communities in Asia Minor in verse 1? Why do you think he describes them this way?

What was the "dispersion"? How did these Christians end up where they are?

How has God scattered members of our church for the sake of the gospel? How might He scatter you?

Peter's mention of the "dispersion" in verse 1 refers to the Babylonian and Assyrian captivities of Israel and Judah by which many Jews were displaced from their homes and forced to live in foreign lands. Peter's audience was probably made up of both Jewish and Gentile Christians, but this mention of the dispersion highlights God's sovereign hand in using the persecution of Israel for the strategic spread of the gospel.

Do you think of yourself as an "elect exile"? Why or why not? How might your perspective and priorities need to change for you to begin seeing yourself this way?

How did the Christians in Asia Minor become "elect exiles" (v. 2)?

The title "elect exiles," denotes that we have been chosen by God—we are no longer our own—He has chosen us and set us apart for His holy purposes. It also tells us that we are exiles—we do not ultimately belong to this world nor do we "fit" in it. We live in a world that is corrupted by sin, a world that increasingly does not understand us, yet God has appointed us to live in this world for His glory.

Why do you think Peter reminded these Christians of the foreknowledge of God the father" and "the sanctification of the Spirit"? How might these two realities help us prepare to stand firm against forces that threaten our faith?

What happens when we rely on our own strength or good works as means of standing firm against threats to our faith?

Knowing that we were made elect exiles by God's foreknowledge and not through our own efforts gives us much needed perspective amid trying times. When we know that God has chosen us by His grace, we will not depend on our own meager strength but rather upon the God who saved us, is sanctifying us, and promises to empower us to live in obedience to Him.

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

In what unique situations and settings has God strategically placed you to be a witness for Him? How might you engage your unique setting for His glory?

Read 1 Corinthians 16:13. What are some practical ways we might prepare our hearts to face persecution? Why is it important that we encourage one another as we seek to do so?

How might forgetting your identity in Christ cause you to waiver during persecution? How might remembering your identity in Christ empower you to stand strong?

Prayer

Thank God for strengthening us to stand firm in our faith under the threat of persecution. Pray that God would help us to see the places He has strategically placed us to live for His glory and serve as His witnesses to those who don't know Him.

Commentary

1:1. The author identifies himself as "an apostle of Jesus Christ." He distinguishes himself from the many false apostles who visited the churches in that day. An apostle is "one who is sent out with a message."

The letter is addressed to the "elect exiles", and to those who God has foreknown (v. 2). These two expressions—mirror images of each other—are inserted early on, to provide comfort. In his greeting Peter's primary purpose was to strengthen Christian faith in the midst of suffering, not to teach the intricacies of doctrine. In themselves, believers are just ordinary people, but the gracious choice of God makes us what we are—the ones whom God favors and loves.

Peter describes the believers to whom he wrote as being "elect exiles of the dispersion." They included both Jewish and Gentile people who had become followers of Jesus Christ. They did not live in the heartland of God's people Israel. Neither did they live close to the mother church of Christianity, also in Jerusalem. Rather, they formed the Diaspora (which derives from the Greek word for "strangers"). That is, they had been dispersed or scattered to other cities and countries all over the world. Specifically, he

wrote to believers living in what is now northern Turkey, some five hundred to eight hundred miles from the hometown of God's people and God's church. They could easily have felt isolated and insignificant. Peter says to these people, "Take courage. Wherever you live geographically, in Christ you are part of God's elect. He chose you."

1:2. Peter's initial desire was to give the believers a lift, an encouraging word. His emphasis in these first two verses should most likely be translated: "To the chosen ones who are strangers in the world, scattered ... according to the foreknowledge of God the Father."

Peter linked their scattering to the foreknowledge of God. In other words, the difficulties God's people face does not surprise God. God the Father knows about everything his chosen people face. He works it all out as part of his plan. "According to the foreknowledge of God the Father" also suggests that all we go through is "according to God's fatherly care." God knew our circumstances of pain before the world began and cares for us in accordance with his fatherly care. This occurs through "in the sanctification of the Spirit." Even amid pain, the Holy Spirit is molding, shaping, and growing believers. The Holy Spirit is turning every circumstance, every sorrow, every hardship into a tool of spiritual maturing.

In the same sentence Peter spoke of being obedient to Jesus Christ. "Obedience" conveys the idea of listening and submitting to what is heard. It involves a change of attitude in the believer. During pain, it is difficult to listen to God, let alone obey him. Yet, since we are chosen of God and are objects of his fatherly care, we are never out of his plan. He is designing our sanctification, our spiritual growth. Knowing that, we can continue, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, to obey the commands of Jesus Christ. That obedience begins with accepting Jesus as personal Lord and Savior and continues by living life each day just as Jesus told us and leads us to live it. We obey the call of Jesus to salvation, the word of Jesus in the Bible, and the encouragement of Jesus found in personal relationship with him each day.

"Sprinkling by his blood" reflects the language of Numbers 19 and the red heifer purification rites (cf. Exod. 24:4-8; Heb. 9:13-21; 10:22, 29). For Christians, the blood of Christ on the cross covers our sins and brings us salvation.

To people sprinkled with Christ's blood and obedient to Christ, Peter gave the typical Christian greeting. Peace reflects the Hebrew greeting shalom, wishing wholeness and meaningful life. Grace is the explicitly Christian greeting, placing believers under the blood of Christ to receive God's free, undeserved grace and hope for living each day.